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PLANNING FOR CHILD CARE

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A brief to the
Ontario Federation of Labour Panel
"Sharing the Caring"
(A Public Forum on Day Care)

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THE
**SOCIAL
PLANNING**
and RESEARCH COUNCIL
of Hamilton and District

The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton & District is pleased to have this opportunity to address the panel on the subject of child care.

Our presentation today is based on the premise that wherever and whenever needed, good quality, affordable child care should be available. Such an objective implies at least three important goals:

- 1) availability: there must be sufficient child care spaces to meet demand,
- 2) quality: children and parents have the right to expect and receive high standards of care,
- 3) affordability: income must not be a deterrent to finding good quality child care.

The failure in Ontario to meet these objectives has been repeatedly demonstrated in the past, and we do not intend to belabour the point here. What we will argue, however, is that this failure reflects a refusal by government to be involved in effective planning for child care. Instead, the history of the provision of child care in Ontario and in Canada demonstrates a series of ad hoc responses to both crisis and funding arrangements. This piecemeal approach has been further fragmented due to the existence of a philosophical bias on the part of government which is premised on a reluctance to interfere in the "private" sphere of family life - in other words, a view of the issues surrounding child care as private rather than public concerns. The result is a lack of clear, coherent policy on child care.

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A. CHILD CARE: PRIVATE DILEMMA VS PUBLIC ISSUE

The tendency of government to view child care as an essentially private problem with the resulting lack of sound policy development is best demonstrated by the fact that major government initiatives in the provision of child care have occurred in response to external factors and not due to any predisposition to see child care as a social priority. Key points in the history of child care have included:

i) First provincial funding during World War II

Funding of child care occurred during World War II under a federal-provincial cost-sharing scheme where subsidies to provinces were available as long as 75% of the subsidized spaces were for children of women working in industries considered essential to the war effort. Provincial funding can be seen as a response to the availability of cost-sharing in combination with the sheer pressure of numbers of women in Ontario working in essential industries.

ii) Ontario Day Nurseries Act: 1946

With the federal government's withdrawal from cost-sharing funding of child care at the end of the war, protest from women who had been working in essential industries and indications that working women were not necessarily about to return to "hearth and home" were key factors leading to the establishment of the Day Nurseries Act by the provincial government in 1946. The Act established 50/50 (Provincial/Municipal) funding for municipalities who would provide child care facilities. The net effect of throwing such costs back onto municipalities was slow growth in the provision of government funded child care spaces. In fact, between

1950 and 1965, licenced day care spaces of any types increased only from 5,476 to 11,034 (101.5%)¹ despite the parallel entry of 368,000 women into the labour force.

iii) Canada Assistance Plan: 1966

Open-ended cost-sharing established in 1966 under the Canada Assistance Plan redistributed the costs of funding child care to 50/50 Federal/Provincial cost-shared (20% of which is actually picked up by municipalities). One consequence was an expansion over the 5 year period 1966 to 1970 in all available licensed spaces from 11,034 to 28,526 (158.5% compared to 101.5% growth in the 16 year period of 1950-1965).² The reduced proportion of costs carried by both the Province and municipalities played an important role in this growth as did the increasing number of working women. In fact, between 1966 and 1970, funding for child care increased 560%.³ The co-existence of this jump with open-ended cost-sharing strongly suggests the primacy of financial - not philosophical - impetus.

iv) End of Open-Ended Funding: 1975

Since 1976 and the end of open-ended funding, cost-shared child care expenditure has increased only as overall cost-shared social service spending has increased, and has represented relatively the same percentage of total expenditure each year (roughly 3.9-4.0%). In other words, there has been little growth in relation to other spending priorities, and child care expenditure, like all other expenditures, has not kept pace with inflation. This restraint is well demonstrated by considering expenditures for new and acquired buildings for child care (which are not cost-shared). Since 1976, capital

expenditures of this type have dropped from \$8,566,630 to \$665,884 in 1980⁴, indicating both an increasing reliance on cost-shared programmes for child care expenditure and a severe cut in one component of programme expansion. Restraint has been the key factor characterizing governmental attitudes to child care over the late 1970's.

v) Summary

It is evident that child care in Ontario has developed in an ad hoc manner where financial determinants and overwhelming social pressure have shaped provision of services. This reactive posture of government clearly indicates a strong bias derived from the view that the choice to parent and/or work is a private choice demanding private solutions. Government has taken an active role only where public pressure has been sufficiently strong and when financial arrangements have been conducive to programme expansion - lack of rational planning and policy development has been the result. The inherent weakness in such a perspective is that the choice to work (particularly by women, whose choices to work, as "traditional" child rearers, have precipitated the increase in the demand for child care) is not a private choice, but a choice rooted in structural (therefore social) change which require social solutions. The contradiction between the need for social solutions and the actual development of solutions in a planning and policy vacuum has resulted in a concrete failure to achieve universal accessibility and good quality, affordable child care.

B. CHILD CARE AS A SOCIAL NEED

The need for expanded child care is the result of significant social changes which have occurred over the last 30-40 years. As demonstrated below, these changes have involved hundreds of thousands of families, indicating not privatized choices, but serious social changes.

i) Women's Labour Force Participation

TABLE 1

Women's Labour Force Participation Rates:* Ontario⁵

<u>Year</u>	<u>Participation Rate</u>
1955	27.5
1960	31.4
1965	34.0
1970	38.9
1975	48.6
1979	51.5

*Defined as the proportion of working age women who actually work.

By 1979, the participation rate of women in Ontario was 51.5, and was almost double what it was 25 years previous. Increased labour force participation has inevitably meant increasing demand for child care, but, as demonstrated in Table 2, increase in the potential need as more women entered the labour force.

TABLE 2

Approved Child Care Spaces and Women
in the Labour Force: Ontario⁶

<u>Year</u>	<u>Approved Spaces</u>	<u>Women in Labour Force</u>
1950	5,476	430,000
1955	6,781	514,000
1960	7,553	663,000
1965	11,034	798,000
1970	28,526	1,041,000
1975	43,115	1,480,000
1977	49,904	1,589,000

ii) Changing Nature of Women's Labour Force Participation

Recent estimates from the Women's Bureau of the Ontario Ministry of Labour indicate recent large increases in the labour force participation by mothers with young children. Since 1975, there has been a 25% increase in working women with at least one child under 3 years of age, and a 10.6% increase in working women with children between 3 and 5 years old. Women with children under 3 are entering the labour force at a rate higher than the women's labour force growth, a fact which suggests an accelerated demand for day care in a time of financial restraint.

iii) Children with Working Mothers

It has been estimated that, as of 1979, only 4.08% of Canadian children under two whose mothers worked were in approved centre spaces; for children 2 to 6, it was

estimated that 15.46% of those whose mothers worked were in approved centre spaces.⁷ An additional 8,127 family day care spaces existed, raising the total percentage of children in Canada in approved spaces to 12.04%. Put another way, 87.96% of children aged 0-5 with working mothers were not in approved spaces: 634,221 children. A recent study by the Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto indicated that most parents surveyed would prefer licensed group care, but the evidence above clearly indicates the need is not being met.

Increased labour force participation by women, more women with young children entering the labour force, and the high number of children with working mothers not in licensed child care spaces indicate very clearly that child care is no longer (if it ever was) a private dilemma; it is, instead, indicative of broad changes in society which require social solutions.

The only sector in society with the resources and a mandate broad enough to take action in response to these changes is government, but to date, government has refused to assume this responsibility. To date, it has responded on an ad hoc basis, with the results which have been outlined above.

C. NEED FOR PLANNING

It is our contention that the provincial government must begin immediately to set into motion an effective planning process which will result in the implementation of a comprehensive child care policy. Such planning would require:

- i) a comprehensive data base,
- ii) effective consultation with a range of constituencies,

- iii) policy development on the basis of the data base and consultation process,
- iv) provision of resources and expertise necessary to implement policy.

With regards to child care, the planning process spearheaded by the provincial government would, minimally, have to include:

i) Data Base

The development of an adequate data base would include:

- ongoing needs assessment
- ongoing needs forecasting
- ongoing catalogue of existing services

ii) Consultation

The development of an intensive and extensive consultation process with:

- federal and municipal governments
- : service providers
- : consumers and potential consumers
- : unions

This consultation process should include consideration of every facet which policy development will have to incorporate.

iii) Policy Development

In light of the developing data base and the consultation process, the provincial government must develop policies which will ensure accessible, good quality affordable day care. We are not here endorsing any particular model of child care, but we would suggest that any policy which would seriously attempt to achieve these objectives would have to include:

a) targeted provision of spaces to meet actual (and eventually projected) need

b) flexibility

(To be truly accessible, child care must be flexible enough to meet needs such as 24 hour availability and emergency care.)

c) accessibility

(Not only must there be sufficient spaces, but they must be available where they are needed, both within a given region or municipality, and across Ontario.)

d) standards of quality

(Licensed facilities are already required to meet standards, but policy should look to improve those standards when possible.)

e) funding/affordability

(Clear guidelines for funding must be developed which ensure that no family which requires child care cannot afford it.)

f) authority

(Policy should clearly delineate where funding, administrative and evaluation authority rests. Minimally, overall planning responsibility should rest with the provincial government.)

g) evaluation

(Clear guidelines for ongoing evaluation of child care programmes should be developed.)

h) community input

(We feel that, in order for child care to be responsive to community needs, mechanisms for ongoing community input into decision making should be developed.)

i) delivery models

Clearly, the degree to which such a policy development process is successful depends on the degree to which effective community participation is permitted in the consultation process. Thus, a strategic choice is involved for advocates of child care: lobbying for change from the outside; or, lobbying for an effective decision-making process which will include the community, making the community internal to the decision-making process. Given the wide range of resources which must be mobilized, it is our contention that lobbying for an effective voice in policy determination should be the target.

Forums such as this become key elements, therefore, in developing an effective consultation process and in determining policy. With the results of public input and broad-based support, they can become not only pointed tools to persuade government to move into the consultation process, but models for the way in which effective consultation and policy development can occur.

iv) Provision of Resources

Since it is our contention that the provincial government should take a leading role not only in policy development but in resolution of the crisis in child care, we feel ongoing commitment by the provincial

government to provide the resources and expertise to fully implement policy decisions is absolutely essential. Policy development should not become an exercise in ducking financial, moral, social or political responsibility.

Clearly, different models of delivery would imply varying levels of resource allocation. For example, an expanded mix of public and private centres might require a different set of resources than a fully publically-funded, community-based model. The key factor in decisions are made and reflected in policy, the provincial government must provide the resources essential for implementation.

D. FINAL REMARKS

The provincial government, failing to recognize the need for public solutions to issues surrounding child care, and responding only in an ad hoc manner to ever-increasing need, has failed to implement effective planning for child care, precipitating a current crisis in the provision of child care.

As a Social Planning and Research Council, we would urge the panel to consider the critical need for the immediate implementation of an effective planning process by the provincial government.

Clearly, we face the concrete political problem of persuading the government to assume its long-neglected responsibility. It is our sincere hope that forums such as this one will begin to build the momentum which will finally persuade government to take long overdue action.

FOOTNOTES

1. Ontario Statistics 1975. Ministry of Treasury, Economics and Intergovernmental Affairs.
2. Ontario Statistics 1975
3. Day Care and Public Policy in Ontario, M. Krashinsky, Toronto, 1971 (p.19)
4. Expenditures by Municipality (for each fiscal year 1976-1980), Ministry of Community and Social Services.
5. Ontario Statistics 1975, and Women's Bureau of the Ontario Ministry of Labour bulletin on Women in the Labour Force.
6. Ontario Statistics 1979.
7. Status of Day Care in Canada, Health and Welfare Canada (1980).

